

## Scenario: Road

### Introduction

The road scenario explores locations for visitor facilities that would serve travelers along a 90-mile road. In order to explore locations for visitor facilities along a road corridor, working assumptions were developed.

### Working Assumptions

1. Among the three scenarios, a 90-mile road corridor would require the greatest number of locations for visitor facilities. As such, the road scenario incorporates all the key locations with an understanding that additional locations may be necessary for less-developed visitor facilities, such as additional waysides and scenic pull-offs. Without an actual route identified on the ground, the locations identified in this study for visitor facilities may or may not be desirable or applicable to future studies pertaining to a north access road proposal, but are discussed as the potentially viable locations given the framework of speculation surrounding this study.
2. The existing park road would continue to operate in the same manner as it does today, consistent with regulations that guide vehicle use limits and preserve the road character and the unique visitor experience. Since the majority of today's bus traffic turns around at the Eielson Visitor Center, the environmental consequences of increased bus traffic on the existing park road between Eielson and Wonder Lake/Kantishna would need to be analyzed.
3. The entire length of a new road would be a two-way road and would be available for vehicle traffic to and from Kantishna. Vehicle restrictions or use limits could become necessary in the future.
4. The Denali National Park bus system (shuttle and tours) would incorporate a new road to Kantishna into their visitor transportation services, thereby expanding current operations.
5. The portion of a new road constructed within the national park boundary would not be maintained during winter, but would remain open while weather conditions permitted safe travel. Once snow and ice posed a safety hazard, the road would be closed within the boundary of the national park, similar to the manner in which the park road is managed past the Denali Headquarters at mile 3.
6. When the portion of a road on national park lands is closed in winter due to weather conditions, the road corridor could be available for winter recreation.
7. Increasing private vehicle access to Kantishna would require establishing vehicle restrictions in the Kantishna area, resulting in the need for a large parking area and an expanded visitor contact/orientation station at the terminus of a new north access road.

The road system in the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would likely need improvement to accommodate large numbers of private vehicles.

8. Increased visitor access to Kantishna and Wonder Lake would result in a greater demand and/or need for additional overnight facilities (i.e., campgrounds, hostel, cabins).
9. Any increased demand for overnight lodging in Healy would be provided by local private businesses.
10. Both Federal and State agencies would seek partnerships with the private sector to provide services to the public, such as in the operation and maintenance of campgrounds.
11. A National Park Service entrance fee (consistent with the National Park Service fee system) or a state fee may be charged to private vehicles traveling a new road to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. A multi-agency road pass could be developed.

### **Locations and Types of Visitor Facilities along a New Road**

The locations, and their associated visitor facilities, along a 90-mile road corridor are discussed below.

#### **Location 1 – George Parks Highway**

A new 90-mile road corridor to the Wonder Lake/Kantishna area would require some type of visitor information center to welcome visitors, provide information, and orient people to the roadway and points of interest. A Visitor Center could be located along the west side of the highway, near the intersection of the George Parks Highway and the Stampede Road. The visitor center could provide similar services to those being offered at the facilities near the entrance area of Denali, such as providing interpretive programs, issuing backcountry permits, selling bus tickets, and making reservations for campgrounds and the visitor transportation system. Ample parking for automobiles, RVs and buses would be provided. A location along the George Parks Highway would provide easy access for visitors traveling from the north or the south, and would accommodate bus tours as well. Visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway could include:

- Visitor Information/Welcome Center
- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Developed campground for tent and RV campers
- Dispersed campsites
- Cultural and natural interpretation
- Hiking trails
- Picnic tables and shelter
- Intermodal transportation center for park buses, hotel buses, and private vehicles

#### **Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake**

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of today's Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. This area could continue to serve as a trailhead and parking area with consideration given to

expanding visitor facilities to serve travelers along a 90-mile road. Visitor facilities at Eight Mile Lake could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Developed campground accommodating tent and RV campers
- Dispersed campsites
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
  - East trailhead for a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
  - Trail paralleling Stampede Road alignment to Savage River and beyond
  - Trails north and south to nearby ridges and foothills
- Wayside
- Interpretive signing/wildlife viewing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Lake access
- Fee station (alternate location for a fee station is Location 4 – Sushana River)
- Public use cabins/ hut-to-hut system

Communication and coordination with nearby landowners would be necessary prior to any future improvement or development at Eight Mile Lake.

### **Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers**

River waysides could be developed, historic cabin site(s) and historic use of the area could be interpreted, and opportunities for wildlife viewing (i.e., moose and beaver) could be highlighted near the confluence of the Savage and Teklanika Rivers. This stop along a 90-mile road could consider the following visitor facilities:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
  - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
  - Trail south to connect with the existing Savage River Trail in Denali National Park
  - Small interpretive loop trail to nearby historic cabins and mining sites
- Wayside
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- River access

### **Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide**

After crossing the Teklanika River, the road alignment rises to an elevation of 2000 feet and an expansive view of the landscape provides the visitors with a distant view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles to the southwest. Visitor facilities at this location could highlight the scenic vista and interpret the surrounding landscape and include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing

- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail
- River access

### **Location 5 – Sushana River**

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This location includes the bus mentioned in Jon Krakauer’s 1996 book, *Into the Wild*, that told of Chris McCandless’ fateful trip to Alaska. While opinions about the bus’s future vary, the bus has nonetheless become a noted landmark and destination attraction for many people.

Visitor facilities at this location could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
  - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
  - Destination trail to “the bus”
  - Destination or loop trail to the two, remote lakes (Sushana Lakes) on state land
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Public use cabins
- Fee station (alternate location for a fee station is Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake)
- River access

### **Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork**

The confluence of the Toklat and East Fork Rivers would offer visitors an opportunity to explore and hike along the rivers. Visitor facilities along a road corridor could include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail

### **Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork**

Visitor facilities at a river crossing near the Toklat and Clearwater Fork Rivers could provide another rest stop and viewing area for visitors traveling along a road corridor. Visitor facilities could include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail

### **Location 8 – Stampede Mine**

The historic Stampede Mine would offer the visitor a unique, interpretive opportunity. Visitor facilities could highlight the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine as it

pertains to Alaska's mining history. The Stampede Mine airstrip would continue to be open to the public and may require improvements. The following types of visitor facilities could be considered:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a small, developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
  - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
  - Interpretive loop trail through historic Stampede Mine site (hardened trails around historic buildings)
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Airstrip-associated facilities, such as an information kiosk and interpretive signing
- A small administrative facility (i.e., a ranger cabin/welcome center) could also be considered

#### **Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide**

A spectacular view of Mount McKinley occurs at Myrtle-Willow divide. This viewpoint would suggest a prime location for a wayside to allow travelers the opportunity to enjoy the view and take photos. Visitor facilities at this scenic viewpoint could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signs
- Viewing platform
- Small, interpretive loop trail
- Trailhead for a trail to Kantishna and connection to a Kantishna Hills trail system
- Small visitor center (similar to Eielson Visitor Center located at mile 66 along the park road)

#### **Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake**

The Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would be the terminus for a new road. With the increase of private vehicle access from a new road, the existing facilities and infrastructure would not meet the needs of increased traffic and visitors. The existing facilities could be expanded, such as the ranger station/welcome center, parking, campground, and trail system. As the existing Wonder Lake Campground currently allows only tent camping, any campground expansion or new development would likely need to accommodate both vehicle and RV camping. The need to provide for increased visitors could also lead to opportunities for private development or expansion of existing accommodations in Kantishna.

Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. A trail system stemming from the terminus of a new road could connect to these and other interesting sites in and around Kantishna. The Fannie Quigley cabin has been restored by the National Park Service and could be the starting point for a Kantishna interpretive/historic trail system.

Visitor facilities at the terminus of a 90-mile road include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses

- Developed campground to accommodate automobiles and RVs
- Additional restroom facilities
- Trailhead for trail system
  - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
  - Connector to existing trails at Wonder Lake and Kantishna
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Expanded Visitor Information Center
- Intermodal transportation center for park buses, hotel buses, and private vehicles
- Restaurant/Food Service Facility

Note: This study does not assess the cumulative effects of a road proposal; however, it is important to note that the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area presently offers a remote experience that would be changed by a new road and its associated increase in vehicles and visitors. An analysis would be necessary to assess the costs and benefits of changing the remote character and experience that is currently sought at Kantishna and Wonder Lake.

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#### **Additional Locations Needed along a Road Corridor**

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As stated in the first assumption, a 90-mile road corridor scenario would require a greater number of locations for visitor facilities than the other two scenarios. In addition to the locations identified and discussed above, additional locations may be appropriate to provide for additional waysides, scenic vistas, and wildlife viewing opportunities for travelers. Identifying locations for these visitor facilities would be more prudent in conjunction with a formal road proposal. However, waysides along a road would likely occur at least every ten miles. These waysides or pull-offs could include parking and restroom facilities and could also include interpretive signs and short loop trails.

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#### **Administrative Support Facilities**

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A 90-mile road with visitor facilities would require administrative support facilities and additional infrastructure. A road camp, similar to the Toklat Road Camp along the existing park road, would need to be developed to provide road and facility maintenance operations and house employees. At least one seasonal ranger station for law enforcement and emergency services would need to be constructed and staffed. Gravel acquisition locations for construction and maintenance would need to be identified. A comprehensive analysis of administrative needs, support facilities, staffing, and their associated costs would need to be completed in conjunction with any future road or facility proposals. These and other administrative facilities would be addressed in an environmental impact statement.

Refer to appendix C for a discussion of additional visitor facility factors, such as costs and design considerations.